

# franciscan

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Icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ

## A creative engagement with Mary

Nicola Slee

Who is Mary for me? This is not a simple question, since, like Jesus, she has been painted, sculpted, written about and imaged in countless ways from

every culture and era and from virtually every conceivable theological perspective. At the same time, the myriad faces of the Virgin Mary have often been created by men, although some of them presumably reflect wider, more popular devotion. It is not surprising that many, if not most, of the dominant images of Mary are ambivalent and alienating to many women. Very few of them can be straightforwardly appropriated for our times and lives; yet I believe, and have found, that the effort to engage with diverse Marian images, traditions and themes is inherently creative.

As I search her many faces, meditate on the different biblical traditions about Mary, and listen to stories of those who have kept company with her down the centuries, I find myself confronted with questions about my own



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## Mary, Mother of our Lord

'But who do you say that I am?' This is perhaps the most searching question in the Gospel. It is, of course, asked by Our Lord of his disciples, but in this May edition of *franciscan* we ask the question on behalf of the Blessed Virgin Mary (to whom the month of May is traditionally dedicated) and we ask it not of the 'original' disciples, but four women writers from different Christian perspectives.

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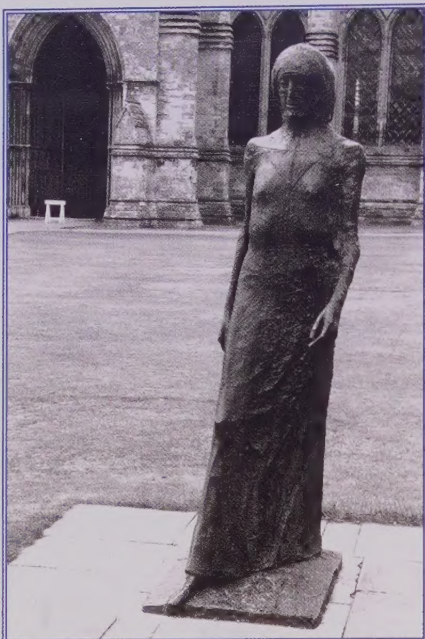


Photo: Joyce CSF

**The Walking Madonna by Elizabeth Frink, outside Salisbury Cathedral**

identity (what kind of woman I am, and am called to become), the nature of faith (its risky daring as well as its receptivity and interiority), the place of suffering in discipleship (the sword that pierced Mary's heart), as well as the nature of the church in which Mary is foremost amongst the saints. The quest to discover who Mary might be and what she might mean for faith is, at the same time, a quest for the suppressed feminine divine and a quest for our own humanity; specifically, for me as a woman, my own femininity.

In what follows, I chart briefly my own journey to engage with some of the multiple names and faces of Mary, and what I have learnt and am learning from her.

Growing up in a low-church Methodist tradition, Mary didn't feature much in my childhood. She came out at Christmas, with the crib and the angels, but then went back into the dressing-up box for the rest of the year. If I thought of her at all, I regarded her as the mild-mannered, God-favoured mother of Jesus, whose role was primarily to bring him into the world. I didn't think about her in her own right, or later parts of her story. If anything, this tendency to sideline Mary was exacerbated in my teenage years, when the Protestant fellowship centre I attended warned me off all things Catholic, and regarded any kind of focus on Mary as dangerous. It took me until my twenties, when I was at university and starting to become influenced by feminism and involved in various Christian feminist groups, to begin to revisit these rather negative and naïve attitudes towards Mary.

Before it became possible to engage creatively with the figure of Mary, I had to confront and work with my feminist anger at the ways in which she has been presented throughout patriarchy. Passive, placid, submissive, sexless, secondary,

suffering, servile – these are some of the ways in which Mary's image has been distorted. Isolated from her own social context, as well as from her other children and the wider community of women, she has been set apart, put upon a pedestal, 'alone of all her sex', as Marina Warner's classic text (Vintage, 1976) has it. I wrote out my anger in poems and liturgies, and shared in the feminist quest for alternative images. I remember the almost physical sensation of shock and freedom I felt when I first happened upon Elizabeth Frink's *Walking Madonna* in Salisbury Close: a wiry old woman determinedly striding away from the cathedral out into the town. Partly what was shocking was to see a Mary who moves – every other image I had seen of her showed her static, immobile; it was difficult to conceive of her having legs, let alone using them (an idea explored in my poem, *Her legs*).

Finding fresh images of Mary has been creative and freeing for me, as has reading a variety of theological approaches. Elizabeth Johnson's *Truly Our Sister* (Continuum, 2004) helped me think about the historical Mary in more realistic ways, but also opened up many theological areas. Johnson recreates the noisy village compound of Mary's youth as part of her insistence that the historical Mary was immersed in a hard-working, peasant economy and strongly communal context. Johnson wants to situate Mary firmly within the community of the saints, those who are and have been God's friends and prophets down the ages – thereby restoring her to her rightful place within the whole panoply of those who have walked in the way of the Gospel, and reconnecting her to many brothers and sisters.

One relational image of Mary that has been preserved down the centuries is that of the Visitation, in which Mary and her cousin Elizabeth greet and embrace each other. This is one of the few places in Christian tradition where female connection is celebrated (women usually being considered in relation to the male), and it is a powerful image of female solidarity, mutuality and spiritual friendship (even if, in a patriarchal reading the 'real' significance of the event is the meeting of the unborn male babies!)

Over many years now, I have been looking for images of the Visitation (medieval Europe offers countless examples, but so, too, do other parts of the globe), collecting them and using them as a focus for reflection and meditation. I have found these images affirming of the female friendships that have been so important a part of my own life, but the Visitation is also a story that speaks of the work of spiritual friendship more generally. The way in which the two women recognize the unborn potential within each other and support each other in their journey towards birth-giving speaks to me of the work of spiritual

accompaniment: a process in which I have been involved as both accompanist and accompanied.

In a tradition that has repressed feminine images of God, the spiritual need for relating to the feminine divine has had to find alternative expression, and perhaps the main place where this has happened in Christianity has been in the figure of Mary and in the many devotional practices associated with her. While doctrinally, she has never been considered divine, Marian iconography and devotional practice may suggest a rather different story of how she has functioned as a symbol of the divine. My own response to this is nuanced. First and foremost, I believe that when the feminine is restored more fully in Christian faith and practice, Mary will be able to take her rightful place as first amongst the communion of saints. At the same time, I want to celebrate the ways in which Mary does and has functioned as an icon of the divine for many. While we lack authentic images of the feminine divine, Mary can speak deeply to our need for a divine mother figure. Thus I understand the need to pray to Mary, to contemplate her face, to come under the shadow of her veil.

While many would testify to the ways in which Mary has led them closer to God, this would include, for me, the ways in which she has led me to a threshold of encounter with the feminine in God. Thinly veiled beneath her form we may find powerful images of a fertile goddess, and whilst this has led some feminists out of Christianity into neo-paganism and other forms of Goddess practice, for me, the journey has led back to a search for the sources of the divine feminine within my own Judaeo-Christian tradition (whilst not ignoring what I can learn from other manifestations of the feminine divine). Mary thus has helped to expand my sense of God, a journey which is ongoing.

f



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# Mary, the original Christian

*Lindsay Newcombe*



I am at my desk surrounded by papers relating to my work. At my feet there are some of my daughter's toys, and papers lie around from the last meeting of the General Synod. Among the papers there is a little prayer card with a picture of Mary the Mother of God on it. Even in my slightly shambolic study I always have Mary near me. I light candles before her image each Sunday morning and visit the ancient shrine of Our Lady of

Walsingham in Norfolk at least once a year. My rosary slips between my bag and coat pocket so that it is usually with me. Unconsciously I have gradually made Mary part of my life and over the years she has become part of my environment.

Before now I haven't really asked myself 'why' it is that Mary is important to me.

Mary was a radical person, an independent woman who overcame fear. She was an honoured and respected figure at the centre of an astonishing movement contrary to the political and religious ideas of the time. As a mechanical engineer, wife, and mother, it is natural for me to be inspired by anyone who is able to combine her various callings that don't conform with what is expected of a woman.

Her role as the mother of Jesus gives her significance for all Christians and it is right to honour her for being the one called to that unique ministry. The many titles she has received over the years indicate how important she has been to Christians through the centuries.

I am interested in understanding Mary, as a person, because of my admiration for her. There is a great distance between her and me in terms of the cultures we live in. However in our generation we do have opportunities to find out more than the Gospel writers tell us. She comes to us in the form of prayers, statues, icons and poetry re-interpreted and repeated many times over the years. Each depiction of Our Lady has the potential to clarify and deepen our understanding of her.

Mary is the original Christian, she has been around longer than any other. In all this time there have been very many

representations of Mary – all interpreted and created by different people, each with a unique energy, made for a particular purpose. The images I like to focus on in particular are images of Mary and Jesus together: the caring image of a mother encouraging, feeding or protecting a tiny child; the powerful image of Mary holding the dead body of her son – a man despised and rejected by rulers and by friends.



Photo: Fr Andrew Waude SSC

*In the Holy House at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham*

I love to discover new things about her through the prayerful interpretation of other people. Now that I have a young child, the images of Mary which inspire me the most are realistic images showing mother and child, candidly catching a moment of family life. This is because I can relate to the dynamics, the love between the two. Love and joy. Love and anxiety. Love and hope.

Jesus came down from heaven and nestled himself in another heaven, the body of Mary. When we receive Jesus in Communion we also become bearers of Christ in a real way so she is a model to us, giving tips on how to receive Jesus. I find the imagery of Mary with the Christ child to be helpful in this; the lightness and joy with which she bears him should be our joy, too.

An image of Our Lady that I sometimes find difficult to relate to because of its celestial opulence is that of Mary enthroned in heaven. Sometimes she is shown enthroned beside her son. I do not see this image as often, but when I do it is

a brilliant reminder that Mary is in an ideal place to help us every day. I love to say the 'Hail Mary' which is based on the words the angel Gabriel said to Mary when he told her of God's plan for her. 'Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.' When I say it I acknowledge that I am not really all that good at prayer, that I allow the day's stresses and busyness to fill my heart and push God out, and I need a friend to help out by praying with me.

Her unique role in the story of our salvation gives Mary a wide appeal, and therefore many people have been inspired to honour her through prayer and art. I love the fact that this gives us many opportunities to come close to her, and therefore to Jesus. And also that it gives us the opportunity to share our experience of Mary with others from different traditions. The image of Mary where I pray most often is the icon in my parish church. When I pray there I remember that I am participating in an activity that goes beyond divisions in the church, quietly uniting the church in prayer.

It is hard to admit sometimes that I find it difficult to communicate with Jesus when I cannot see him in the flesh the way I see family, friends or colleagues. Mary helps by showing us a very close relationship with him. She loved and cared for him, Luke tells us she got anxious when he ran off in Jerusalem, and was astonished by him. Mary overcame fear and leaped in to life, and she changed the world when she bore Jesus. Jesus Christ is a person - it's that simple, and it's that complicated - it's that ordinary, and it's that extraordinary. It is through Mary that this miracle happened, and through her relationship with him we can come to love and know him better too. f



*Dr Lindsay Newcombe is Lay Vice-Chairman of Forward in Faith and a member of the General Synod of the Church of England.*

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# What shall we call you?

## The Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God in the Orthodox Church

### Mother Mary



When we enter an Orthodox church, we pray to Christ and the Mother of God by venerating their icons, in preparation for church services. The name that each person uses to silently call upon the Mother of God when they kiss her icon, or light a candle, can vary according to cultural background. Her primary name is Theotokos, which means 'the one who gives birth to God' or 'Birth-giver of God', while 'Mother of God' is used as an English translation.

The Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God is such a popular form of thanksgiving that it is sometimes just called 'The Akathist'. It is uncertain who composed *The Akathist*, which means 'standing' as we stand throughout the service, just as we might stand when someone of importance enters a room. Although *The Akathist* celebrates Mary's virginity calling her 'Bride without Bridegroom', the poem's focus is the great Mystery of the Incarnation of Christ.

'Every angelic being was amazed at the great work of your incarnation.

For they saw the One who is Unapproachable as God, as a mortal approachable by all, living his life among us.'

Each verse tells the story of Christ's birth and is followed by a chorus that begins with 'Hail', or in some translations 'Rejoice', which is the greeting used by the angel Gabriel to the Mother of God.

'Rejoice, height hard to climb for human thoughts,  
Rejoice, heavenly ladder by which God came down,  
Rejoice, bridge, leading those from earth to heaven.'

Some of the most beautiful poetry is in the salutations that use metaphors from Creation.

'Rejoice, vine with a branch that does not wither,  
Rejoice, orchard of fruit that bears no taint,  
Rejoice, mother of the star that never sets.'

Here you can see that the salutations point to Christ, and this is true of all Orthodox prayer to the Mother of God. When we pray to the 'Queen of Heaven' to ask for help, it is to ask her to pray for us to her Son, because his ear is always

*Each of us has our own individual relationship with Mary and will respond to a particular way in which she points to Christ.*

close to the voice of his mother. We do not believe that the Mother of God alone has power to save us, but rather that she can help us through her intercession.

'Rejoice, acceptable incense of intercession,  
Rejoice, propitiation for the whole world.'

Do these great attributes that we give the Mother of God lose sight of the young, Jewish woman called Mary? Do they create a distance and make it difficult for us to form a personal relationship with her? Icons usually represent her as a strong and mature woman, but if we take a look at the icon of the Nativity of Christ, (see page 1) we see details that remind us of the humanity of Saint Mary, as she is called in the Coptic Church.

Along with the familiar elements of the story of the Nativity, at the bottom of the icon there are two figures of old men on the left, and some women washing a baby on the right, (detail below). Who are these

people and why are they included in the icon?

On the left is Saint Joseph bent over in troubled doubt about the Incarnation, and looking towards him is the ragged figure of the devil, or 'The Old Man' as he is often called, tempting Joseph into disbelief. In some icons Mary looks away from Christ towards Joseph. She is not portrayed pleading with him to believe, but as praying for the grace for him to overcome his doubt. On the right are the midwives who are helping Mary after the birth by washing the infant Jesus. These details come from the apocryphal *Gospel of James*, or the *Protoevangelium of James* as it is called in the Orthodox Church.

Another example of her humanity is in the icon of the Annunciation. Mary is depicted as spinning a yarn for the veil of the Temple, which in Orthodox hymnography represents the skin of Christ. Here the Mother of God is represented as a village woman who spins and weaves, which was an activity of great importance to the identity of Greek and Middle Eastern women. We shall probably never know if these details are historically accurate. The importance is that they create images of the life of the Holy Family that enable us to picture them as human beings with whom we can identify.

The Mother of God is a guide for us; a light that shows us a selfless, loving Way to Christ. Each of us has our own individual relationship with her and will respond to a particular way in which she points to Christ. For me, that has been her example of prayerful silence,

'Rejoice, faith in things that demand silence.'

This contemplative silence sometimes means keeping verbally silent, as the Mother of God did after the birth of Christ,

*Continued on page 5*



**Mother Mary is an Orthodox nun who lives alone at Saint Sunniva Skete, in a small island in the Shetland Isles, northern Scotland.**



*Continued from page 4*

'But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Luke 2:19), but sometimes it means speaking out for the sake of others, for example, at the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-10) where she persuaded Christ to perform his first miracle. She is the first person to know her son as the Son of God, and we can hardly imagine the emotional discipline and silent prayer to God that she must have had throughout her life, in order to support her son and his disciples.

What shall we call you? No one name is adequate for the Mother of God; she surpasses all classification. Perhaps the most appropriate way to call upon her is within the silence of prayer, asking for her help that we all may become birth-givers of God, in our heart and our lives. *f*

## Music for the Liturgy

Settings of the Psalms and Canticles, edited by Br Reginald SSF and suitable for small groups to sing, are available on:

[www.franciscans.org.uk/resources / music resources](http://www.franciscans.org.uk/resources/musicresources)

Also included are Responsorial Psalms for Festivals and a 3-year cycle for Sundays and simple Mass settings by Br Christian and Br Reginald.



*'Virgin and Child' by Peter Eugene Ball, installed in Southwark Cathedral in 1989 and cleaned and regilded by the sculptor in 2013.*

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## Hilfield Friary 2014

**Hilfield Youth Camp, 10-17 August**  
Contact: Bob Bailey  
[office@sandalmagna.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:office@sandalmagna.fsnet.co.uk)



**Stigmata Festival**  
Saturday 20 September  
**Eucharist at 12 noon,**  
*followed after a picnic lunch by a talk on a Franciscan theme*



For further information and for the programme of events, see [www.hilfieldfriary.org.uk](http://www.hilfieldfriary.org.uk)

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rugged realities of work and sorrow, homelessness, persecution and abandonment, which afflict the poor today as much as they did in the time of the Roman empire. Mary gave birth among the animals, she fled into exile with Joseph and the infant Jesus, she trudged the countryside with her Son, and she remained there at the very end, in the greatest condition of abandonment that any human being can experience. In the Mother of God at the foot of the cross, we see the heart of God breaking open to let in the world through the wounds of his Son. That tear-stained woman fainting with grief on Calvary is the Queen of Heaven, and at their best Catholic art, liturgy and devotion have always held these reconciling paradoxes together.

Pope Francis has repeatedly said that he wants a 'messy' Church, a poor Church of the poor, which is not afraid to take risks and which puts the joy of the Gospel before all our distracting pre-occupations with rules and regulations. Mary is our guide and companion through the messy risks that come with living in the joy of the incarnate Christ. She continues to incarnate Christ deep within the sinews of our humanity. That is why her cult is so multi-faceted, her image so readily available to all who lay claim to her. Redemption is universal, but incarnation is particular. We can only understand what Christ means if we can recognise him and serve him in the face of our own neighbours and communities. Mary reveals that divine face to us through her ongoing participation in the incarnation as the sanctification of all creation. *f*



*Tina Beattie is Professor of Catholic Studies and Director of the Digby Stuart Research Centre for Religion, Society and Human Flourishing at the University of Roehampton in London.*



# The Virgin Mother of God - Wisdom's paradox

*Tina Beattie*



**Wisdom is an enigmatic and elusive presence in the Bible. The Book of Proverbs portrays her as the playful spirit of God who was present at the birth of creation. In the Catholic tradition, both Christ and Mary have been identified with the figure of Wisdom. One of Mary's titles is 'Seat of Wisdom', (*sedes sapientiae*). In Romanesque art she is portrayed sitting on the Throne of Wisdom, in a way that suggests that she herself is the throne upon which Christ as Wisdom sits.**

These prismatic images resist rational explanation. The Marian tradition is expressed in symbols and stories, in music and art and popular devotions. It is best understood in terms of paradox and mystery, for it is the threshold between the human and the divine, where we dwell in a space of reconciling wisdom beyond the limits of human understanding. That is why Mary has always been associated with the Motherhood of the Church. She is

either/or. The knowledge of good and evil enables us to judge and condemn, to blame and to shame, to divide and to rule. It is the form of knowledge by way of which every other competitive and violent impulse enters the human heart. The reconciling wisdom of the incarnation invites us to embrace a paradox wherein we must unlearn the knowledge of good and evil, to fully inhabit the grace and goodness of the life that Jesus offers. Mary, Mother of God and mother of the poor, 'full of grace', is our supreme model of how to live that life of grace.

But Mary herself has been the victim of the bitter divisions that have inflicted such wounds upon the body of Christ. She has been claimed as the champion of warriors and crusaders, raised high on imperial banners, enthroned in the palaces of the rich, and in the Reformation she became the focal point of all the antagonisms which still today divide the Church. As women have begun to shake off the conditioning of centuries of subordination and silencing, many have said that her virginal motherhood is an impossible ideal which has been used to oppress women.

All this is true, and it has to be faced with courage and honesty. But we also need to rediscover the sacramental depths of the Marian tradition, in which the joy of the incarnation brings new hope to the human heart. We can only do this if we recognise the reconciling wisdom at the heart of all the paradoxes that Mary represents. This means resisting the constant temptation to translate those paradoxes into dualistic conflicts, which can only further divide and alienate us from one another and from God.

The fundamental paradox is that of the virginal motherhood of Mary. For the earliest theologians, this was not about a rejection of sex or the control of women – although it would soon become both. It was about the full divinity and humanity of Christ in the mystery of the incarnation.

Mary's virginity represents the recreation of the world out of nothing by God. She is herself the new creation (which is the deep meaning of the Immaculate Conception), and she is the one who cooperates with God in bringing about the new creation in Christ. Patristic thinkers refer to her as the 'rational paradise'. St. Anselm says in one of his sermons that 'God, then, is the Father of the created world and Mary the mother of the re-created world.' In an era when we urgently need to rediscover the intimate harmonies that weave us into the music of creation, Mary is a symbol of God's creative love continuously renewing and sustaining the cosmos. In this context, her virginity refers to the awesome mystery of those aspects of creation that remain unsullied by human intervention – like the virgin forest or the virgin ocean.

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As mother, Mary represents the humanity of Christ, so that his flesh is woven into the materiality of creation and into the unfolding of the human story from the beginning of time. In the conjoining of virginity and motherhood, we encounter the same paradox that we encounter in the conjoining of Word and flesh, of God and human, in Christ. We are invited to contemplate that which is not possible from our dualistic human perspective, and through that impossibility to be drawn into the mystery of the incarnation.

Yet Mary's story also calls us back to the

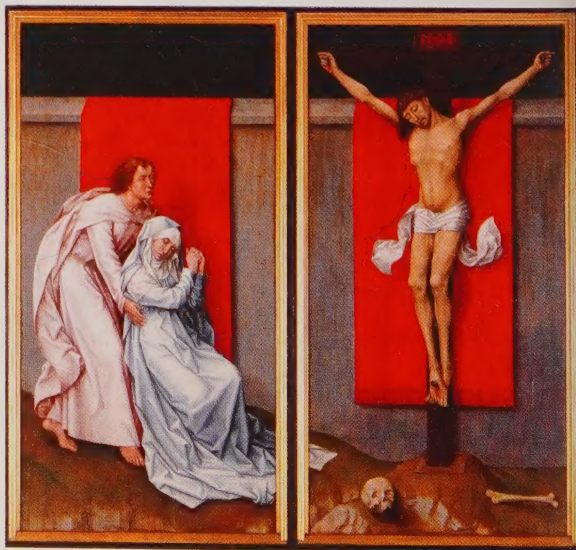
*Continued on page 5*



*Throne of Wisdom, twelfth century,  
Musée de Cluny*

the personification of that mystical dimension of sacramentality and wonder which we enter into through the sacramental life of the Church, and which expresses itself in neighbourly love and service to those who are poor and suffering. Just as Mary nurtured the infant Christ and stood at the foot of the cross, so the Church is called to care for the vulnerable and the oppressed and to walk with them through life's long journey from Bethlehem to Calvary.

This reconciling mystery calls for vigilant and prayerful attentiveness to the dynamics of grace. The Book of Genesis tells us that the human condition is blighted by the knowledge of good and evil. We find it difficult to think in terms of both/and, because we are constantly lured towards thinking in terms of



*Rogier van der Weyden, The Crucifixion, with the  
Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist Mourning,  
c. 1460, Philadelphia Museum of Art*



## Minister's Letter

**Brother Clark Berge, Minister General of the First Order Brothers, writes:**

Dear Friends,

In a couple of friaries the brothers have adopted the practice of having a brief time of Bible sharing every morning—telling each other which passage of the Scriptures that were read and prayed through at Morning Prayer, was most meaningful, and why it impressed them. Sometimes it is a bit perfunctory, pre-coffee and breakfast. Anyone can 'pass.' But most rise to the occasion. I love listening to the brothers sharing about the Scripture in this informal way. You might like to try it—after the Office, blurt out which passage moved you and why!

When we have more time, our sharing can be intellectual or even a bit of a performance. As I have listened to the practically spontaneous sharings over the past few years, sometimes we get a jeremiad if he hears something that taps into an old wound or preoccupation. Still I hear, over and over, the brothers picking up on messages of love and worship, messages of hope: the very heart of our vocation as Franciscans.

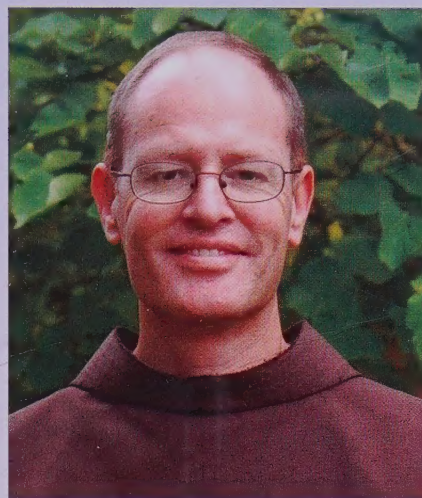
It is healing and reassuring to listen to brothers fumble around trying to say how they love God, or are happy to be a brother. The Scriptures open a

way for us to see each other from a bigger perspective. Otherwise it is only too easy to allow the stresses and strains of community life to cloud the way we see each other.

It also happens that a brother will share much the same thing, day after day: moved by different passages of Scripture that tell of God's love and forgiveness. This consistency can penetrate the consciousness and inform the prayers of even the most despondent or discouraged brother. It is a beautiful thing to be tuned into that message.

Today, February 5, according to the Anglican Church of Melanesia's lectionary, we heard St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians: 'You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky' (Phil. 2:15b). I was moved by the image of stars, and reminded of the call to let my light shine to give comfort and direction to others. In the same way, I get my bearings from both the Bible and from others around me. In their light I see light. It is the light of Jesus Christ shining in all our hearts.

I once visited the Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome. As a young man showed me around, he told me stories of their work for peace, their work with the poor and homeless, and other initiatives. 'This is so beautiful!' I



exclaimed. 'How do you get the community to adopt these initiatives?'

He paused for a moment. Then, nodding as if confirming the truth of it, he said: 'Bible Study. We share the Scriptures and the Spirit guides us.'

I am sure, community life being what it is, that there is a lot of talking, planning, praying, negotiating. But what better way to live a Gospel life?

I heartily recommend the devotional use of Scripture. And don't be afraid to talk about it with your friends. God is depending on it!

May the Lord give you peace.

*Clark*



## Theme Prayer

Holy Virgin Mary,  
among women born into the world,  
there is no one like you.

Daughter and servant of the most high and supreme King  
and of the Father in heaven,

Mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ,

Spouse of the Holy Spirit, pray for us

with Saint Michael the Archangel,

and all the powers of heaven and all the saints,

at the side of your most holy beloved Son, our Lord and Teacher.

*Francis of Assisi: The Office of the Passion*



The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ, *Theotokos*, 'the Christ-bearer', whatever her title, she has been represented by the faithful in various artistic forms throughout the ages - a third or fourth century wall painting in a catacomb in Rome depicts the Adoration of the Magi, with Mary seated and holding the Child while the Magi bring their gifts. As popular devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary grew in the Middle Ages, and the Rosary, promoted by the Franciscans, became a popular way of praying and meditating on the scriptures, Mary was often to be seen in Calvary scenes, one of the group of women at the foot of the cross, or with St John, depending on the gospel text the artist was representing, or supporting Jesus' inert body prior to his burial.

The Editorial team sought out some images of Mary that show her in less traditional stances or with cultural adaptations that indicate her adoption as Mother to all those who believe in her Son.

(1) Our Lady of the Cenacle.

(2) Dame Barbara Hepworth's 'Madonna and Child' in St Ila's Church, St Ives, Cornwall. It was done as a memorial to her son Paul who was killed on active service with the RAF in Thailand in 1953. It was photographed by Joyce CSF.

(3) The Pietà, sculptured by Naomi Blake, at St Mary The Boltons Church, London.

The Church of the Annunciation, Nazareth, features a number of mosaics of Mary with facial features and dress representative of specific countries; (4) is from Korea, (5) is from Thailand.

(6) A Holding Madonna, ie a figure which is designed to fit easily into the palm of one's hand, in the Church of Santa Maria Rosaria, Assisi.

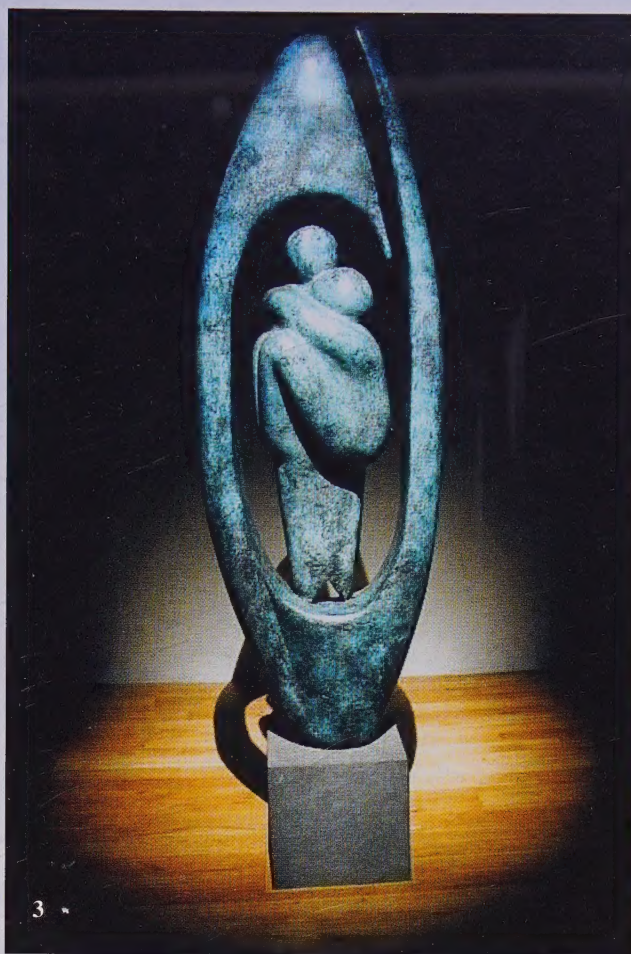
(7) A modern sculpture of Our Lady, near the Church of San Stephano, Assisi.

(8) A patronal banner depicting an older Mary, in Lincoln Cathedral. Mary is shown with a goose, the companion of St Hugh of Lincoln; the city at night is behind her with the cathedral prominent on the hill as a crown; her left hand holds a cross which is entwined with green leaves, signifying Christ's resurrection. Used with permission of the Dean and Chapter.





# Mary





# Community Routes

## ♦♦Radical then, radical now

On 9 November 2013, Hilfield Friary celebrated the centenary of the Little Commonwealth, a school which was housed at Hilfield from 1913 – 18. It was founded by Homer Lane, a charismatic leader with educational ideas almost more radical today than 100 years ago. 35 visitors came for the centenary, including three teachers from the Kinokuni Children's village in Japan. The participants were all leading practitioners, academics, writers and thinkers reflecting on the future of residential therapeutic child care and education, organised by Craig Fees of The Child Care History Network.

Speakers for the day included Michael Fielding, author of *Radical Education and the Common School – a democratic alternative* (2012) and Albert Lamb, who spoke on 'The Rescue of Childhood: Homer Lane and A.S. Neill'. Neill was heavily influenced by Lane and founded Summerhill School, at which Albert Lamb was both a pupil and teacher. Brother Philip Bartholomew SSF told how the small school Fr Owen started at Hilfield in WWII, using some of Lane's ideas, led to the founding of St. Francis School, Hooke.

Emily Charkin, a PhD student in the history and philosophy of radical education, contended that children building their own schools can learn more than being in an expensive purpose built flagship school. John Diamond, CEO of the Mulberry Bush organisation, explored the value of communal living with emotionally troubled children as a model of authentic shared responsibility.

David Gribble of the International Democratic Education Network and founder of the Sands School in Devon, spoke about democratic schools in Japan and India.

Some delegates not only wanted to see

and learn about the Little Commonwealth and the community at Hilfield today, but also spent the night before the conference in the buildings that Lane, helped by the child citizens, built: Veronica (now Juniper House) and Bracken (now Bernard House). The conference was held in the newly refurbished recreation room, formerly the Little Commonwealth schoolroom. The Little Commonwealth Court Book was on display, thanks to the Earl of Sandwich and the Dorset History Centre, in which the citizens listed their misdemeanours and the discipline they imposed upon themselves.

After lunch, Brother Vincent led the group in dedicating a centenary celebration oak tree.

## ♦♦Hilfield Families Camp

Each year families from all over Britain converge on Hilfield Friary for the much loved Families Camp. Dating back to the early 70s, this is now a venerable institution and some of the original campers are still very much part of the camp. The Camp, for families of at least two generations, begins and ends with Chapel worship on the Sundays. In between, the adult campers take part in discussions in the mornings led by a visiting speaker, while children and teens go off for their own activities. Afternoons are devoted to holiday activities such as trips to the seaside or a walk over the hills to Cerne Abbas. Towards the end of the camp a large bonfire is lit and everyone sings as it burns down, there is an imaginative Camp Eucharist, and finally there is an entertainment – a sort of camp revue of acting, music and comedy.

Conditions can be tough, with tents and some caravans occupying land that is vaguely flat with a long walk to the loos and facilities at the Friary. On the other hand, the grounds and views are a heavenly place of great beauty and peace. Families make their own breakfasts but lunch and supper are prepared and eaten together in the marquee allowing the whole camp to come together. Those who come value the way the camp brings



Castle-building on a day at the beach for Families Camp

together opposites: peace and exuberance, prayer and play, work and leisure, conversation and contemplation

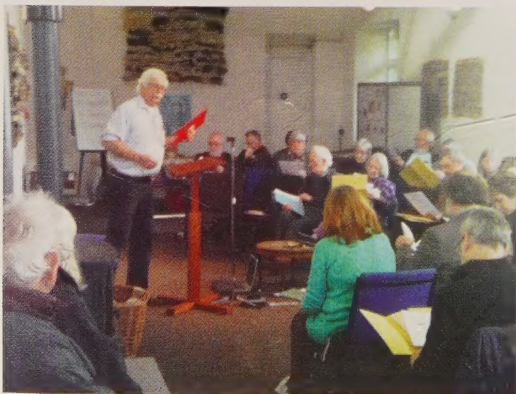
The camp is what it is partly because of its strong links to the Friary and the sharing that takes place between camp and community, and partly because families have opportunities both to be together on holiday, but also to be a part of something bigger with responsibilities and joys from sharing time with others. If you have a family and are interested in joining the camp this year then do please contact us for more details. We warmly welcome new families and our aim is to ensure the delights of the camp and its beautiful setting can be shared with new generations.

This year's camp runs from Saturday 26 July to Sunday 3 August. If you would like to know more then please contact Helen and Kelvin Inglis on 01256 893644 or [hinglis733@btinternet.com](mailto:hinglis733@btinternet.com).

## ♦♦Novices' pilgrimage to Assisi 10 – 19 October 2013.

**Joseph Emmanuel writes:**

Given the importance of the city of Assisi to the mother and father of our Franciscan movement it is not surprising that a pilgrimage to Assisi is one of the 'learning outcomes' in the programme for the Formation of Novices. Three years' worth of Novices (two in their third year awaiting First Profession in vows; four in their second year and one in his first year) set out for Assisi on 10 October 2013 accompanied by **Sr Beverley CSF**, **Br Desmond Alban SSF** (our Novice Guardians) and **Sr Damien OSC** (the newly elected Abbess of Freeland). Over the next nine days (the last courtesy of Italian industrial action!) we saw many of



Dr Craig Fees organised the conference in the newly refurbished recreation room, formerly the Little Commonwealth schoolroom.





#### Novices and Novice Guardians

From top to bottom: *Christopher Martin, Damien OSC, Michael Jacob, Desmond Alban, David, Micael Christoffer, Cristian Michael and Beverley. Robert was elsewhere at the time of the photo and Joseph Emmanuel was the photographer.*

the places of major importance to Francis and Clare in Assisi, in the stunning Umbrian countryside and even further afield in Tuscany (La Verna). For each of us a particular place struck a particular resonance; many commented on the silent stillness of Greccio; others on the numinous atmosphere of the Basilicas of San Francesco and Santa Chiara and still others on the impact of the Carceri and Fonte Columbo. What a privilege it was to go to these places; to have one's prayer time before the great gentle Christ on the cross of San Damiano (housed in the Basilica of Santa Chiara), before the tomb of St Francis and to participate in a service with OFM Brothers in La Verna! Huge thanks must be expressed to **Beverley** and **Damien** for their support and enthusiasm, to **Bruce-Paul** (who was Chaplain in Assisi at the time) and in particular to **Desmond Alban** who not only continues to transmit something of his passion for St Francis to the Novitiate but who also masterminded the whole operation – including the unforeseen extra day with its financial and logistical implications – with military precision.

## ◆◆ Learning about global economics

On Monday, 13 January First Order sisters and brothers began to arrive in Alnmouth for the 'Franciscan Responses to Poverty'

Conference (organised as part of the 'ongoing formation' initiative). Tuesday saw us being joined by Steve Forster and Liz Chadwick of 'Together Newcastle' who described some of the ways the current situation affects our near neighbours. As part of the day we were challenged to budget effectively for a family of four on a reduced income; a very difficult if not impossible task. On Wednesday, Dr John Hughes, Chaplain of Jesus College Cambridge, gave a wonderful presentation on the response of Church leaders (and in particular Archbishops Justin and Rowan and Popes Francis and Benedict) to the global economic crisis. During the presentation he suggested that there is a great need for those responsible for economic praxis to give due regard to the effect it has on the poorest members of our

society. Economics needs to be 'grounded' in the reality of life. On Thursday Averil Swanton TSSF joined us to talk about the work of Franciscans International who are already challenging poverty and injustice throughout the world.

## ◆◆ Fair and sustainable?

### Gina reflects on prison ministry

It is with some relief but also with a heavy heart that I am about to retire at the age of 70 after nearly fourteen years of ministry as a part time prison chaplain, mostly at Wormwood Scrubs Prison. It has proved to be the most challenging but rewarding role I have taken on in forty-seven years in religious life.

Until the last few years there has been time to seek out those who are self harming or at risk of suicide and continue regular support until the worst of the crisis

is over. I have also been able to offer pastoral care to the bereaved and those struggling with relationship or other personal issues, irrespective of whether they profess the Christian faith or not. Sadly, however, this vital aspect of chaplaincy care has become much more difficult to maintain in a consistent fashion for a number of reasons, all of them at bottom to do with financial cut-backs.

First, the chaplaincy team, like other departments of the prison, has been slowly whittled away to a level at which it is all we can do to cover the statutory duties. The prison service is in the midst of a bench-marking exercise to determine the minimum level of staffing that is, to use the current jargon, 'fair and sustainable.' In my opinion it is already proving to be unfair and unsustainable. The chaplaincy team at Wormwood Scrubs, serving over 1,200 prisoners, now boasts only two full timers and both of them fulfil a number of other non-chaplaincy roles. I sincerely hope my replacement will be found and appointed soon but if the experience of other London prisons is anything to go by, that may prove to be very difficult. Meanwhile there will be an Anglican chaplain in the prison only two days a week and the pressure on the remaining chaplains will be notched up yet another turn with my departure.

As the number of prison officers has also been substantially reduced it has become much more difficult to access prisoners to give one-to-one pastoral care. If there is only one officer patrolling a landing he or she cannot unlock a cell. All anyone visiting the prisoner can do is talk through the crack in the cell door. It has also become more problematic running chaplaincy groups because reductions in the numbers of discipline staff has led to only half the landings being unlocked at any one time. This means only half as many men get to our classes as used to.

I think the prison service is moving towards a time when chaplains will have few directly pastoral or liturgical duties but will be responsible for recruiting, training and co-ordinating a team of volunteers to do the work of chaplaincy. While I am full of admiration for the wonderful volunteers I have worked alongside, I think the task of prison chaplaincy is too big to be dependent on high levels of volunteers. Prisoners will suffer. They are suffering already.

## ◆◆ Round up

James Race was admitted to the novitiate on 16 January, taking the name **James Douglas**.

In Korea, **Frances** and **Jemma** moved into their new convent at Il-Seon-Ri, near Gumi, at the beginning of March, when the internal work had been completed. The dedication of the building is to take place in May, when **Sue**, the Minister Provincial CSF, will be visiting. *f*



*John introduces Dr John Hughes, a speaker at the global economics conference.*



## Focus on 85 Crofton Road

Franciscan life in the East End has many faces. Maybe one of the most unusual ones is to be found in 85 Crofton Road. It is a meeting point of generations (from 33 to 88), backgrounds (from former business man to ex-sailor) and nationalities (three staunch Englishmen with a little Welsh mixture meet a German). And so we muddle along together with the people around us, who, if anything, are even more diverse. More than half of the population in Newham was born outside the UK and the religious map of the Borough is as colourful as can be.



*Vaughan, Robert, Donald and Edmund*

It all began in a remarkable act of generosity, when in the early 70s, Margaret Duncan, a member of the Third Order, left her home to the Society of St Francis. She had long worshipped at St Philip's, then the Brothers' Mission Church, and she was a close friend of the Community. A friend of Margaret's, May Groves, the seamstress at Westminster Abbey, continued to live in the house, and soon Brother Donald moved in too, his prison chaplaincy work bringing him back from Portsmouth to London. Various Brothers lived here for a time over the years – Julian, Oliver, Thomas Anthony and others. Eight years ago Edmund came here after doing a time of house for duty with other Brothers in the parish. Eric Michael stayed here for a while, on his

way back to the States. Most happily, Vaughan moved here just two years ago. Then, last September – one of us, squeezing himself into the old Office! – Robert arrived, making a foursome, (The Four Apocalyptic Riders, as Julian describes us). This gave us a fresh dynamic and prayer-life of our own, for which we are grateful.

The House of the Divine Compassion in Balaam Street – Helping Hands to the whole neighbourhood – remains an inspiration

for our life. Three of us are there most days; Vaughan has developed a tremendous ministry with marginalised people at Praxis in Bethnal Green, a

charity whose founder had been inspired by Brother Thaddaeus SSF. It is an organization serving migrant communities, particularly people (men, women and children) who are homeless, have immigration issues and/or are escaping domestic violence. Vaughan also serves as a trustee for a local charity called Just Homes, which has strong links to Praxis. He says: 'Although a lot of my work is providing practical assistance, the most important part is listening'. Besides the social justice work, Vaughan is also on the Anglican Religious Communities committee ARC, where he has a special interest in promoting the Anglican Religious Life.

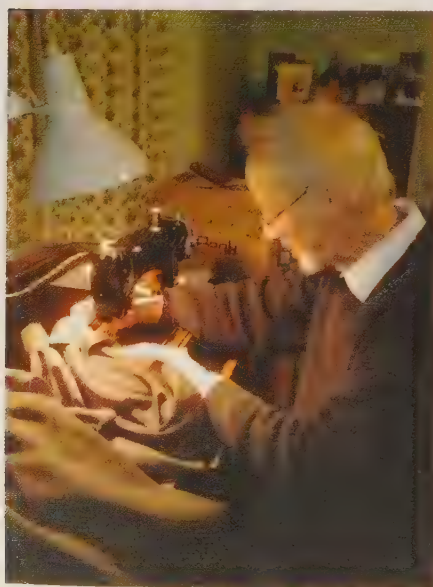
Because we don't have a Chapel as such, we pray together in the living-room – our multi-purpose computer, TV, library, eating and prayer space! (No cat or dog – yet!) We share Morning Prayer at ten to eight and try to fit in our Quiet Time of prayer before. Most of us usually gather for Mass at Balaam Street with Julian and some members of our wider family, at midday. And even in the midst of busy city-life, we are trying hard to be together

at home for Evening Prayer and to eat together afterwards. Our day ends quietly with Night Prayer, between nine and ten (as indeed is true for all our houses).

Donald and Robert usually go over to Balaam Street in the mornings, where they spend most of their time with Julian and the others welcoming people and listening to them. Donald and Edmund take turns presiding at the shared Mass. For more than 25 years, Donald has also been rooted in the congregation of St Alban's in Ilford. He takes an active role in the ministry of the church, con-celebrating each Sunday, preaching at times and caring for the people. He goes there now by electric buggy and bus – in all weathers. His presence is very much valued and appreciated. Edmund is concerned pastorally with quite a few people and sometimes is let loose on Churches in Chelmsford Diocese (= Essex) and in London. He tries to do his bit as a very ex-physicist for Climate Change awareness – and would like to do lots more. Robert has spent his first months with us trying to be attentive to the place and the people (and succeeding, most happily!). Wednesdays find him at the soup kitchen run by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, in Canning Town – following on from Brothers Vaughan and Peter's good work there. He considers it a privilege to listen to people's stories and he is grateful for their trust in him. *f*



*Robert in the soup kitchen, and Donald talking with a friend*



*Edmund making a habit*





## Reviews

**Brian K Reynolds**

***Gateway to Heaven – Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods***

(Vol. I *Doctrine and Devotion*)

ISBN: 9781 5654 8449 8

**New City Press, 2012, 414 pp, £27.50**

If, like me, you have a passionate devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as Theotokos – as life giver to the Word Incarnate – but are slightly less comfortable with more modern (i.e. post eleventh century) articulations of Marian dogma for theological and/or feminist reasons then this book will make a valuable contribution to your thinking. In the Introduction Professor Reynolds, a linguist by profession, states that the book is a result of his wish to understand the place of Our Lady in the Christian faith. In so doing it is very clear that he has taken this challenge extremely seriously and has read exceptionally widely: the bibliography is over forty pages long of which twelve pages are devoted to primary source material, some of it 'mainstream' but also containing some rarer gems. Such is the breadth of Professor Reynold's reading (which encompasses a truly awe-inspiring range of writers from Egeria, that redoubtable Religious and traveler of the fourth century to our own equally redoubtable Anthony of Padua) that Sarah Jane Boss (a theologian who has contributed greatly to our contemporary understanding of Marian theology) notes that *Gateway to Heaven* supercedes Hilda Graef's *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* and the fascicle of Georg Söhl in the *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* in its thoroughness – high praise indeed.

Each Chapter focuses on a different Marian doctrine and explores not only its development in the East and West but also its reception and application in a written style which is accessible without being patronising and, more importantly, without any obvious bias (Roman Catholic or Orthodox). *Gateway to Heaven* is an excellent book; a genuine exploration of the place of the Blessed Virgin in our faith and a must-have for any aspiring Mariologist – I hope that I might be asked to read and review Volume 2!

**Joseph Emmanuel SSF**

**Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild**

***Rhythms of Remembering  
An Everyday Office Book***

ISBN: 9780 281 07079 4

**eBook ISBN: 9780 281 7080 0**

**SPCK, 2013, 180pp, £9.99**

Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild, with the help of SPCK, have provided the praying public with this splendid compilation, designed to meet the needs of those who value prayer and are aware of the need to anchor it during the day with something a

bit more effective than a vague intention to 'pray without ceasing' as scripture commands.

Of course, there are already many condensed office books designed mainly for those already committed to the Divine Office, but who increasingly find themselves on the move and their existing arrangements too cumbersome. This book is not for them. There is also the 'new monasticism' – often of dispersed communities with an office of their own. This book is not for them – yet.

So, is there a market for *Rhythms of Remembering*? YES! All thoughtful, open minded people, perhaps not totally committed to a 'church' (and there is a lot to discourage the thoughtful and open minded from such commitment), who nonetheless would describe themselves as Christians and who value prayer, could do with a copy. They all have mornings, middays, evenings and nights, they can all find two minutes in which to drop the anchor, and they would all find in these pages sentences from scripture and from spiritual writers to nourish the inner life, to warm the heart, to act as the ship's compass. It slips into even a small pocket without altering the contours of the clothing, and into any handbag!

BUT it does call for serious, old fashioned commitment. It cannot profitably be abandoned after the first taste or the first week. Give it a year, and then decide!

**Anselm SSF**

**John Dominic Crossan**

***The Power of Parable***

***How fiction by Jesus became fiction  
about Jesus***

ISBN: 9780 2810 6811 1

**SPCK, London, 2012, 256pp, £10.99**

Since seminary I have understood parables as dangerous little stories. They are like plants taking root in a sidewalk crack that eventually break up the hard smooth surface of the sidewalk. Parables do the same for our religious and spiritual imagination. However, seminary was a long time ago, and I haven't pursued the disruptive potential of parables very far since. *The Power of Parable* is an easy-to-read guide into a deeper understanding of parables.

In this book Crossan excavates the Scriptural fissures created by the parables. First he provides a helpful scheme for distinguishing different kinds of parables and examines how they function in the Scriptures. He writes about riddle parables, example parables, challenge parables and attack parables. Some parables morph from category to category depending on who is telling the story. Under Crossan's keen teaching the Scriptures become as lively as *The Washington Week in Review* with authors challenging each other in different understandings of how God works in the world and how we participate in that Divine work.

For instance he demonstrates how 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' appears over and over in Matthew's Gospel versions of Jesus' parables. It is unique to Matthew, so the question is, 'What is Matthew up to?' Matthew is caught up in a 'stern family feud in the 80's between Christian Jewish scholars and Pharisaic Jewish scholars.' I find that kind of insight liberating. Beginning to distinguish the voices and purposes of the Scripture writers, the reader can learn to listen for the authentic voice and message of Jesus.

Repeatedly Crossan emphasizes that Jesus is non-violent and we are called to oppose violence and 'co-create with God a world of justice and love, peace and non-violence.'

This is a remarkable and important book.

**Clark Berge SSF**

**André Vauchez**

***Francis of Assisi - The life and afterlife  
of a medieval saint***

Translated by Michael F. Cusato

ISBN: 9780 3001 7894 4

**Yale University Press, New Haven &  
London, 2012 (English edn), 398 pp,  
£22.50 (hb), £14.99 (pb)**

An eye-opening book indeed, that might destroy several romantic features of the popular Francis. Vauchez does not intend to demolish Francis, but to understand him on his own terms. He highlights the tendency right from the beginning to pick and choose. From Thomas of Celano onwards, biographies dwelt on aspect of Francis they liked, ignoring the more uncomfortable ones (obviously dependent on contemporary fashions). Thus, they never really tried to do justice to this immensely complex and at times contradictory personality.

Vauchez proceeds in three steps. Starting with a 'biographical sketch', he makes the second step before the first, because this portrayal depends on the following two sections. There he analyses first the hagiographies, then Francis' own writing. Vauchez studies the numerous medieval biographies, assessing whether the picture of Francis they paint is coherent with the personality that emerges out of his own written heritage. In a nutshell: Francis was a spontaneous and down-to-earth person. He wanted to live in a gospel based fraternity and struggled with the administrative and subtle juridical necessities of transforming it into a religious order.

This process was imposed on him by the growth of his movement and the papacy; but he was never really happy with it. His vision of *minoritas* was rather alien to his successors: following Christ in his kenosis by renouncing power and living in poverty together with the marginalised. Over time, Francis takes on superhuman, eschatological, even christological dimensions, becoming more 'admirable than imitable' (Bonaventure). But the concrete person gets lost out of sight (and



every need to live like him). Vauchez judges for example, that the frescoes of Giotto in the basilica of St Francis (inspired by Bonaventure) show 'a lack of understanding that border on betrayal'. Essentially, clerics take over the order and manage to ban the laity from it. They are closely allied with papal attempts to reform Christianity, but show little interest in the poor man of Assisi.

**Robert nSSF**

**Michael Mitton**

***Dreaming of Home:***

***Homecoming as a model for renewal and mission***

ISBN: 9781 84101 877 5

**BRF, London, 2012, 151pp, £7.99**

This is an intimate book: a personal story and reflection on the author's move into freelance ministry and Fresh Expressions of church life, revolving around an imaginative re-telling of the parable of the Prodigal Son from the Gospel of Luke. The theme of homecoming is as much about being at home in one's self as finding the external environment in which to be rooted and grow. Those who are familiar with Henry Nouwen's book on the Prodigal Son, as mediated by the painting of the son's return by Rembrandt, will recognise a similar approach in this book.

The introduction includes a moving tribute to Brother Ramon SSF, a close friend and guide to the author; and there are many stories of individuals, friends and colleagues, as the meaning of the Prodigal Son is explored in the context of today's church. I particularly enjoyed the retelling of the parable, and was able to picture a well-known tale in a new way.

I did have one or two reservations: the sharp distinctions drawn between Law and Grace, and the polarising of Pharisees and followers of Jesus, I found harsh to the ear. These dichotomies have not had a happy history in the course of Jewish-Christian relations. Modern scholarship seems to find Jesus more as an internal critic of the Pharisaic movement rather than an outside observer, and even St Paul had some good things to say about the Jewish Law.

Nonetheless the book showed someone wrestling with a text, trying to explore it from the inside out, and I was grateful to be included in that process. You feel you know the writer much better by the end of the book, and hopefully yourself as well.

**Nicholas Alan SSF**

**Simon Parke**

***Pippa's Progress***

***A Pilgrim's Journey to Heaven***

ISBN: 9780 2325 2954 8

**DLT, 2012, £9.99**

The front cover asks the question, What if John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* today? And in 20 short chapters, and in the undeniable approach of Bunyan's all-time best-seller, we are invited to share the journey of joys and pains encountered

by Pippa, who he renames Pilgrim, and the inevitable challenges that ensue. It begins at home when she suddenly trips and falls down stairs, and ends as she emerges from *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Caught between her natural inclinations to enjoy life and testing its worth, her various discussions make for a series of discernments in choosing what is truth as opposed to what the contemporary world offers as 'dressed in truth'.

There are some really good laughs in this well written book about very basic matters. There are also both beautiful and profound moments in this fantastic and wholesome allegory as you meet Will Good and Con-sultant and a host of others. 'On your journey', advises Will, 'every hill has a name, every path a purpose, every clearing a meaning'. Her little entries into a notebook replace the short poems in Bunyan's narrative. The series of vivid illustrations by Harry Parke add to the depth of the narrative, quite excellent.

My tears of relief at the end signified how closely the author had taken me past milestones of reality through his character Pilgrim, which had lead through many familiar paths to the promise of heaven.

**Damian SSF**

**Christine Valters Paintner**

***Lectio Divina: The Sacred Art***

ISBN 9780 2810 6711 4

**SPCK, 2012, 206pp, rrp approx £9.95**

The author of this compact, informative and helpful book is a Benedictine oblate who lives and works in the USA, and whose activities are not confined to the writing of books. She is the leader of a virtual monastic community whose members have the benefit of a professionally organised website available to anyone who searches for 'Christine Valters Paintner' on Google.

However, *Lectio Divina* stands on its own as a valuable guide to the practice of 'the sacred art' and is in three parts, each of four chapters. Part One begins the exploration, Part Two introduces the four parts – Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio – Part Three (Reading the World) applies the technique to images, sounds, nature, experience. Each chapter concludes with suggestions for practical exercises.

Paintner does for Benedictine and western tradition, what Antony de Mello did for the Ignatian and eastern tradition in the experience of many Christians.

**Anselm SSF**

**Richard J Woods OP (Ed)**

***Meister Eckhart – Master of Mystics***

ISBN: 9781 4411 3442 4

**Continuum, N.Y., 2011, 194pp, £17.99**

This is a book of essays, variously commenting on Eckhart's work. The title Meister, which for reasons unknown stuck with him, derives from his position at the University of Paris.

In his preface, Timothy Radcliffe compares Eckhart's teachings with the Buddhist teacher who said, 'I pray to God to rid me of God!' Eckhart's version was, 'For you to know God in God's way, your knowing must become a pure unknowing, and a forgetting of yourself and all creatures.' It should not surprise us to know that his writings influenced the writer of the Cloud of Unknowing.

Born in the thirteenth century, the son of a knight, Eckhart of Hochheim was influenced by the growth of Rhineland mysticism. He was a follower of Aquinas; and as a vicar in their Order, a teacher and friend of many educated women who joined the Dominicans, attracted by the combination of study and spirituality. When, in later life, he was discredited unjustly as a heretic, many of his writings and sermons were saved through being memorised by these women. Sadly he died before he could be vindicated. His principal thesis was of an imageless God, to be discovered by each one in the way of God for that one.

**Elizabeth CSF**

**Clark Berge SSF**

***The Vows Book:***

***Anglican Teaching on the Vows of Obedience, Poverty and Chastity***

ISBN: 9781 4951 0038 3

**Vest Pocket Publications, 2014, 140pp, available via [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk), £9.54**

This book about the vows is written in long thin columns so that they are easy to read and remember. The author, currently the Minister General of the brothers of the First Order of the Society of St Francis, draws on his own rich experience of the religious life to talk about the vows in a meaningful, honest and down to earth way, which challenges us all who have made our religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. He gives a clear insight into the vowed religious life for those looking in from the outside and those who are seeking God's will and exploring their own vocation.

Each Chapter is accompanied by a set of questions which grounds the vows in the areas of justice, righteousness, politics, economics and sexual feelings. Clark Berge has spent a number of years living as a Franciscan in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and this book will certainly be useful for those living in countries where English is not the first language. Just as important, though, it is a book which calls on those of us living in 'The West' to reflect afresh on the vows we have taken, often many years ago – how much we have taken back of so much we wanted to give; how much we have compromised and sought the best of all worlds; how much we have wanted the freedom without the renunciation.

This book is an honest book, a refreshing book, a book which is long overdue and we should thank Clark Berge for writing it.

**Benedict SSF**



# Jenny Tee CSF

*This obituary is based on the sermon preached by Helen Julian CSF (the 'I' of the obituary) at Jenny's funeral, and the tributes given by her family, and one of a group of her close friends, at the service. The readings, chosen by Jenny, were Psalm 103, and John 1:35 – 39.*

Jenny and I shared something quite unusual – a love of contemporary poetry. We told each other about authors we'd enjoyed, and passed on books we thought the other would like. Her friends recall how she had an uncanny knack of recommending an author they'd never heard of – and then discovering it to be one of the best books they'd ever read. Good books, and good poetry in particular, have an open-ended quality – when you reach the end everything isn't left neatly tied up. Good poetry makes the reader do some of the work; and it can carry different meanings every time you read it.

Along with that ability to enjoy ambiguity, Jenny also had a clear and systematic mind. It isn't a gift always found among Franciscans (Francis himself certainly wasn't systematic) and I for one appreciated the way she put that gift at the service of the community in several important pieces of work.

Those qualities had enabled Jenny to rise to senior management in British Airways. Born and brought up in Reading, she was an only child, but her parents Barbara and Harry ensured that she spent a lot of time with wider family, especially her cousins, who remember her mother's wonderful baking (a theme in her friends' recollections too!) Later she was a much loved 'Aunt' to her cousins' children. She studied Town and Country planning at Newcastle University, where she became one of a group of five friends whose friendship lasted for 40 years. One of them described her as 'the thread always

running between us, always in touch with what was happening with us, never dropping a stitch.'

Her family recalled that whenever people talked about Jenny the word which cropped up most often was 'good'. She cared deeply for her family, friends, and the wider community, and translated this caring into action, volunteering with prisoners, children, and the homeless, and during her time as a sister also with students and those of other faiths. It's a sadness that having arrived in Leicester with its many opportunities for this kind of ministry, her illness often prevented her from doing what she would have loved to do there.

*Sister Jenny Tee CSF  
died on 21 November  
2013, and her funeral was  
held at The Church of the  
Resurrection, Leicester.  
She was aged 58 years and  
was in the sixth year of her  
profession in vows.*

Although that caring might have seemed to point in the direction of a Franciscan vocation, in fact the first time Jenny encountered CSF, visiting Compton Durville, she came simply to reflect on her life and career. She had quite recently returned to the faith from which she'd moved away as a teenager, and so perhaps it wasn't surprising that it turned out to be also an opportunity to encounter God. She later chose to spend some of a sabbatical with us. But her natural caution when making major decisions, perhaps founded on her abilities both to see clearly and to see many possibilities, meant that it took a while before she even acknowledged that life as a sister was drawing her, and even longer before she made the leap of faith and came to test her vocation. Like the disciples of John encountering Jesus, Jenny had found something which wasn't what she had thought she was looking for, and she had the courage to follow that leading.

That pattern of careful and searching reflection was repeated before she made her vows too – and by then I was aware that it wasn't just the caution of someone who could see all sides of a question, but also a very genuine humility which doubted what she had to offer, and whether she was 'good

enough' at this life to continue. We give thanks that she made the decision which she did.

The psalm which Jenny chose points to her trust in God; it both begins and ends with 'Bless the Lord, O my soul' and it celebrates God's steadfast love, forgiveness and mercy. Through the recent years of illness and treatment, hope and setbacks, her uncomplaining acceptance (which she of course played down and didn't think was anything exceptional) was in fact inspiring. She stayed interested in others, and 'didn't do self-pity'.

Psalms are a form of poetry, and the particular Gospel which Jenny chose for this service is also rather like a piece of poetry in that it doesn't conclude neatly with the end of the story. It's four o'clock in the afternoon when the reading ends – we're left wondering what happens next.

That quality of being open and unfinished reflects the reality of human life. Every ending, every death, leaves a sense of what is unfinished, and that is stronger with a death at this age. The sense of loss, almost of outrage, at the 'might have beens' is strong and painful. But though the reading as we have it is unfinished, the gospel does of course go on, to the disciples' choice to follow, through their lives of service, right through to the death of the one they chose to follow. That seemed like the end, and it was an end, the end of Jesus' life on earth, but it was also the beginning of something new and greater. In the resurrection of Jesus death was defeated and a new way opened, a way to eternal life. His story goes on, and Jenny's story also goes on – but now beyond our sight. God's steadfast love is not defeated by death; it is from everlasting to everlasting.

God called Jenny to 'come and see', to listen to his teaching and to share in his care of all whom he had made; Jenny chose to respond to that call and to follow, and she is following still as God leads her on into a new life, a life which will never end. *f*



Jenny Tee CSF

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# Teresa CSF

## *From the sermon preached at her funeral by Damian SSF*

If the truth be told, Nan Foster, born in 1928, had a difficult and unhappy childhood, losing her Mother when she was two, and with a sometimes distant Father, moving around first with the Army and then, after the War, in the RAF. Her nickname 'Tim' might indicate she grew up as something of a Tom-boy. But she had learnt to be Christ's disciple as part of that growing up and she held to that, as Tim became Nan who became Sister Teresa of the Community of St Francis.

Teresa only eventually came to the Franciscan family after two tours with the Church Mission Society, though we can see how she had already been thinking of vocation at the time of her first job when, known as 'Matron' at her uncle's boarding school (though really only the assistant), she offered herself for training first as a nurse and then as a midwife at St Thomas's Hospital. In 1956, at the age of 27 Nan was indeed thoroughly trained for the work assigned to her with CMS in Egypt. However this tour proved hugely costly to her, in exposure to the traumas of ugly warfare and some horrific sights as the Suez Crisis escalated, and as she found herself under house arrest. Her family recounted that she never quite got over that deathly experience, and CMS wisely relocated her to Sierra Leone where she served altogether more happily for the next eight years in a team of like-minded colleagues with a structure of prayer and service in a more predictable role.

Completing her time in West Africa she was left in a dilemma. They wanted her back at St Thomas's as an executive; Africa had touched her heart. But there was a deeper call to give herself more completely, which she felt she was resisting. After talking it through with Aubrey Evan-Hopkins, the Vicar of Folkestone and a friend of Brother Edward's, she agreed to visit Compton Durville to become a little more informed. However she was determined not to make a good impression, arriving on a motor bike, daubed with bright ruby red lipstick and with an equally red outfit, looking as unlikely a candidate for a convent as Maria in The Sound of Music. Strangely or not, Mother Agnes saw beneath the surface and the reluctant Nan was made a postulant on 1st January 1965, and given the name in CSF of Teresa.

The rest you might say is history! Her training as a nurse fitted in well in a recently constructed ward for the frail and elderly at Compton Durville and she later took charge of the Convent Home. Yet she could still spring surprises, like when she asked if she could discard her habit because she wanted to go horse-riding, and so became the first CSF sister to be

seen in public in mufti. How she loved the fresh air, to feel the breeze in her hair, to ride the hills on four legs – or four wheels: for she recounted how on her first visit home, her Dad offered her the ignition keys of his open-top car; together they sped up the dual-carriageway, her veil flapping in the wind, and he turned and said to her in fatherly relief, 'So you are still my daughter!' On one occasion Teresa gently escorted Sister Muriel to the local GP, suspecting she'd had a

*Sister Teresa CSF  
died on 16 December  
2013, and her funeral  
Mass was held at St  
Germain's Church,  
Birmingham.  
She was aged 84 years and  
was in the forty-sixth year  
of her profession in vows.*

heart attack. The doctor disagreed and directed them back home, but Teresa went the other way to South Petherton Hospital where the fact of a heart attack was quickly confirmed.

Whether Teresa was a handful or not, Mother Agnes announced that, now in first Vows, she had been chosen to go and live at Alnmouth Friary – another first for the two Communities who were seeking closer ties. She was in her element. Though initially she was told that her cell was apart, on the ground floor, and she wasn't to join in singing the plainsong in Chapel, she slowly edged into the full life of the brothers and proved the success of the alliance. She certainly enjoyed the company of men and her natural positioning of herself as a Number Two meant that those gifts of perception and encouragement enriched the community life no end. There were many endearing qualities in Teresa, providing you didn't ask her to cook! A lasting memorial at Alnmouth is the etching of Saint Clare for which she stood as a model, now placed beside a matching Saint Francis.

There is so much more: Novice Guardian for almost the decade of the seventies; Provincial Secretary for five years; and attendance at a course at the Irish School of Ecumenics in Dublin which led to the opening of the CSF house in conjunction with the Brothers in Belfast. She and Sister Nan acquired a delightful pup with a broken tail called Scrap whom

she trained and walked all over Cave Hill above the city. Things were still pretty rough in the 80's and Teresa's work with Crossroads took her into many an IRA household where all her diplomatic skills were carefully exercised. She was probably close again to what had so terrified her in Egypt but the words of Our Lord to Peter, 'Do you love me?' provided a second chance to allow herself to face heavily traumatic days, this time more in God's strength.

New Zealand followed and founding a region with a small group of Sisters on the other side of the world was again not an easy task. But she turned to her Lord through the turning point of a directed retreat in Auckland, as doubt became faith and she settled into a task for which she had been feeling ill-equipped, giving herself more deeply to other people, enabling them to stand firm, even indeed to function. If others might have felt left out, that is the other side of the coin. Her personality tended towards the introvert, which sometimes worked brilliantly, as with many in Newcastle-under-Lyme to whom she gave spiritual direction. Others may have been left cold. 'It's all too much' she could be heard mumbling under her breath or addressing the dog. And then as happened on one occasion when a preacher didn't turn up, she got up and spontaneously preached a memorable address which one sister present said gave her stories and illustrations that have kept her going for years. Her election as Minister General in 1996 again left her feeling uncomfortable, but she undertook the role in faith, and approached her task pastorally and as a spiritual guide.

Teresa's loss of memory more recently in these last years in Birmingham was painful to her and to those who cared so wonderfully for her, and when finally last March it was recognised that she needed professional care she moved quietly into Albion Court. But somehow the quality of our sister was still able to shine through. Such credit was expressed for her Christian life by their Sister-in-Charge who said, 'Dementia took away her memory but it didn't take away who she was.' Teresa shone as a witness to the Resurrection. Thanks be to God! f



Teresa CSF